Elements of the Translator's Cultural Bias in Urdu Translation of

The Alchemist

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Abstract

The study aims at investigating various elements of the translator's cultural bias in the Urdu translation of The Alchemist (in English). As culture, language, and translation are interlinked, the translator is inevitably influenced by his own culture while translating a text. This bias may exhibit itself in different forms in the target text. The study explores these various elements of cultural bias shown by the translator. It employs Al-Masri's (2017) conceptual framework of emic-etic approach originally given by Pike (1954). Data are analysed qualitatively and various examples of the cultural bias of the translator are analysed by the researchers. It is concluded that the translator has chosen to either not translate the items at all or has altered the meanings of the source text items when translating them. His choice of preferring one strategy over the other does not seem to be following a set pattern except that he did that based on his cultural bias.

Keywords: cultural translation, translation studies, English-Urdu translation, translator's bias, emic-etic

1. Introduction

The study investigates the elements of the translator's cultural bias in the Urdu translation of The Alchemist. Although the twentieth century was called the 'age of translation' by Jumplet (as cited in Newmark, 1981, p. 3), we stand in the post-twentieth century world still unable to define translation, and, as Das (2005) suggests, it is 'not an easy task'. As translation is a difficult process, the role of the translator becomes equally demanding. The ability to understand any language depends on the culture it comes from (Morgan & Cain, 2000). Das (2005, p. 7) also says that 'the translator has to make a balance between maintaining close fidelity to the original and utter freedom from it'. This balance is never easy to achieve for any translator. The study attempts to analyse those elements that are rooted in the cultural bias of the translator and these elements become apparent in the target text as it is translated. The study may prove to be a useful reference guide for both aspiring and experienced translators in the Urdu-English translation context.

Although research has been done exploring the relationship between culture, language, and translation and the way culture influences the translator, there seems to be a lack of specific analysis of actual text that has already been translated by translators in the Urdu-English context. In other words, there is a need of both qualitative and quantitative research of the target text (TT) in Urdu from the source text (ST) in the English language. This study investigates one area in this domain and looks into the

elements of cultural bias of the translator as he translates from the ST (in English) into the TT (in Urdu**).**

The study aims at investigating various elements of translator's cultural bias while translating the source text (*The Alchemist*) into the target text (*Keemyagari*). The objectives of the study are to:

1. highlight the translator's bias due to his cultural background, and
2. identify the various ways he employs to convey the source text meanings while trying his best to not compromise on his cultural norms.

In line with the objectives of the study, the following questions are considered:

1) In how many ways does the translator showcase his cultural bias while translating the items (words, phrases, or sentences) he deems inappropriate in his particular context?
2) How successful is the translator in preserving his cultural norms by not transmitting the source text culture as much as possible?

2. Literature Review

Culture encompasses all the various aspects of human activities, both physical and spiritual. The anthropologist Malinowski suggested that culture is not only a way for people to get their physical needs but also to fulfill the needs of their souls such as creating art or coming up with a system of belief (Sulaiman, 2012).

Culture may be defined as a set of beliefs, which governs the behavioural patterns of a society. These beliefs include religion, economy, politics, literature, and language. Thus, language is an integral part of the culture. Translation, in turn, involves two cultures, the culture of the source language (source culture) and the culture of the target language (target culture) (Aziz & Muftah, 2000, p. 85).

Some societies are more rooted in religion than others. Generally, Eastern societies are more impacted by the religious beliefs than the western societies (Sulaiman, 2012). A translator, who belongs to such a culture which is more conscious of religion, is more inclined to cultural bias rooted in his religious beliefs.

A translator is not only a creator, but also a comparatist (Das, 2005). Hence, a translator may take liberty and alter the ST and substitute ideas that may not be equivalent into the TT. A translator's choice of this alteration depends on the culture he belongs to. The study looks at the various ways the translator may show these choices based on his cultural bias.

3. Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature. The data analysed are the words, phrases, or sentences found in the translated text of *The Alchemist* (the source text) in its Urdu translation *Keemyagari* (the target text). This Urdu translation was published by Centre for Human Excellence, Lahore, in 2009. A point worth mentioning is that *The Alchemist* is itself an English translation of the original *O Alquimista* by Paulo Coelho written in Portuguese. The English version is translated by Alan R. Clark and published by Clays Ltd. in Great Britain. The English version analysed in the study is the 2002 edition published by HarperCollins Publishers, London. The following parameters are used to guide the data collection. Words, phrases, or sentences are collected for analysis if the translator chose to do one of the following:

i)   delete the item (word, phrase, sentence) from the source text altogether i.e. he did not translate the item at all as if it was non-existent in the source text, or

ii)   substitute the item from the source text with a completely different item in the target text.

3.1 Conceptual Framework

The basic concept adapted for the study comes from Al-Masri's (2017) adaptation of Pike's (1954) emic-etic approach to cultural translation. The basic terms are elaborated as follows.

3.2 Pike's Emic and Etic

Pike (1967) originally coined the terms 'emic' and 'etic' from the ideas 'phonemic' and 'phonetic', respectively. Morris et al. (1999) have elaborated this distinction of Pike's emic and epic as related to the (1)'inside perspective of ethnographers who strive to describe a particular culture in its own terms, and (2) the outside perspective of comparativists researchers who attempt to describe differences across cultures in terms of a general, external standard' (p. 781). Ever since then, the distinction has been adapted in numerous researches (see Watson-Gegeo, 1988; Olive, 2014; Sabbagh, & Golden, 2007; Morris et al., 1999; Monteagut, 2017; AL-Masri, 2017).

3.3 Adaptation of Al-Masri's Framework of Emic-Etic Approach

Al-Masri (2017) adapted this distinction and put forth her proposed implications of Pike's (1954) emic-etic approach to cultural translation. The last of the three implications she proposes suggests that while bringing the two cultures closer to each other, the researcher (translator in this case) who belongs to the 'outside' culture (in this case Urdu native speaker translator, translating into English), 'carries along with him inevitable bias (imposed by her/his own emics)' (Al-Masri, 2017, pp. 12-13). This

cultural bias is reflected by the choices the translator makes while translating the text from an outside culture into his own, of which he has an inside perspective.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

The data are analysed qualitatively. Various elements of cultural bias shown in the TT are analysed by comparative analysis of both the ST and the TT. Any instances of 'deletion' or 'substitution' in the TT are analysed based on the cultural background of the translator. These instances in the form of words, phrases, or sentences are shown, both written in the TT, and the ST in a tabular form with an additional column of 'back translation' (Newmark, 1991, p. 7). Tables are preferred as they provide a better visual representation of comparative data. The additional step of 'back translation' is employed in the study to further elaborate the textual differences created by the elements of the cultural bias. The first column shows the source text by the English translator of *The Alchemist*. Similarly, the second column shows the target text in Urdu in *Keemyagari*. The final column shows the back translation of the target text done by the researchers. The tabular illustration of data precedes the analysis of the example text.

Table 1

Concepts Based on Religious Beliefs (i)

Source Text (English)	Target Text (Urdu)	Back Translation
1. He drank from the **wine** that remained from his dinner…(Clarke: 7)	اس نے جھنجھلاہٹ دور کرنے کے لے **پانی** پیا۔۔ (AlGhazali: 27)	To get rid of the irritation, he drank **water**
2. …fill his **wine bottle**,… (Clarke: 11)	بوتل **تازہ پانی** سے بھرے گا (AlGhazali: 30)	fill the bottle with **fresh water..**
3. ..and he found a bench in the plaza where he could sample the new **wine** he had bought. The day was hot and the **wine** was refreshing (Clarke: 16)	دھوپ میں ابھی تک شدت تھی ۔اس نے اپنی بوتل نکالی اور **پانی** پینے لگا. (AlGhazali: 34)	The sun was still too intense. He took out his bottle and started **drinking water.**
4. He said he was tired and thirsty, and asked if he might have a sip of the boy's **wine.** (Clarke: 17)	"کیا میں آپ کی بوتل سے تھوڑا سا **پانی** لے سکتا ہوں۔" بوڑھے نے کہا۔ (AlGhazali: 35)	"Can I have some **water** from your bottle?", asked the old man.
5. He was sitting in **a bar** very much like the other bards he had seen along the narrow streets of Tangier. (Clarke: 35)	تانجیر کے تمام **قہوہ خانے** ایک دوسرے سے بے حد مماثلت رکھتے تھے۔ (AlGhazali: 46)	All **the cafes** in Tangier resembled each other a lot.

Table 1 illustrates five different examples from the ST and the TT. In the first four examples, the word *wine* has been substituted by the translator for a more culturally acceptable word *water*. As an insider of the Urdu speaking culture, the translator is well aware of the cultural norms and beliefs or the 'emic' of his culture. As an 'outsider' of English culture, when he realized that the word *wine* when translated into Urdu would be 'شراب' which is illegal in Pakistan where Urdu is spoken as a first language and this is where his intended reader is actually coming from. He has most probably decided to alter

it and substituted it with a neutral, commonly occurring, one of the basic necessities of human survival, *water* (پانی) in Urdu. This has been repeatedly done by the translator on multiple occasions (four times in the first part of the novel that is the focus of this study's analysis); hence, this is clearly not an unconscious slip on his behalf. Similarly, he has not just deleted it, he has actually substituted a word from the ST with another in the TT, so this seems to be a more deliberate, well-planned attempt at keeping the reader of his translated text more at ease. For many Urdu readers, reading about drinking wine could cause a feeling of discomfort, especially when it is associated with the hero of the novel they are reading. A verse in the Holy Quran clearly bans all kinds of intoxicants; "O you who believe, intoxicants, gambling, altars and arrows of chance are afflictions which are the work of the devil; you shall stay away from him that you may succeed" (Holy Quran, 5:90). A similar explanation may be given for changing the word *bar* to a word in Urdu 'قهوہ خانے' which means 'cafés'. Undoubtedly, cafes and bars are not the same in terms of their services and what one expects to get at each of these places. Bars would offer alcoholic beverages and drinks while cafes normally serve tea, coffee, and similar non-alcoholic drinks. Hence the translator has changed the word *bar* to a permissible word in Urdu 'قهوہ خانے'.

Table 2

Concepts Based on Religious Beliefs (ii)

Source Text (English)	Target Text (Urdu)	Back Translation
1. When someone sees the same people every day, **as happened with him at the seminary,** they wind up becoming a part of that person's life. (Clarke: 16)	اس کے خیال میں جب آپ کسی کے ساتھ زیادہ دیر تک رہیں۔تو آپ اس شخص کی زندگی کا حصہ بن جاتے ہیں۔ (AlGhazali: 34)	He believed that once you spend a long time with someone, you become a part of that person's life. **(The phrase in bold in the source text is not translated in Urdu.)**
2. "That's never happened to me," they boy said. **"They wanted me to be a priest, but I decided to become a shepherd."** (Clarke: 19)	"میرے ساتھ ایسا کبھی نہیں ہوا" لڑکے نے جواب دیا۔ (AlGhazali: 36)	"Nothing like that has ever happened to me," the boy responded. **(The phrase in bold in the source text is not translated in Urdu.)**
3. Arabs often appeared in the city, **shopping and chanting their strange prayers several times a day.** (Clarke: 19)	شہر میں اکثر عرب نظر آتے تھے۔ (AlGhazali: 36)	Arabs were often seen in the city. **(The phrase in bold in the source text is not translated in Urdu.)**
4. **The gods should not have desires, because they don't have destinies.** But the king of Salem hoped desperately that the boy would be successful. (Clarke: 35)	سلم کے بادشاہ کی شدید خواہش تھی کہ وہ چرواہا ضرور کامیاب ہو۔ (AlGhazali: 45)	The king of Salem desperately wanted that Shepard to be successful. **(The sentence in bold in the source text is not translated in Urdu.)**

5. From where he sat, he could observe the plaza. People continued to come and go from the baker's shop. A young couple sat on the bench where he had talked with the old man, andthey kissed. (Clarke: 29)	Paragraph not translated at all.	NA

Table 2 presents six different examples where the translator has either not translated the ST at all, or he has altered it with items (words or phrases) that he considered more appropriate according to his 'emic' knowledge of the TT culture. All of these examples of the translator's choices seem to be influenced by his culture which is rooted in his religion (See Sulaiman, 2012). In Example 6, the word *seminary* is not translated into the TT, and to avoid translating it, the entire phrase in the ST containing this word is not translated. Similarly, in example 7, a related word *priest* is not translated as well and the same technique of not translating it is employed by the translator. In example 8, 'shopping and chanting their strange prayers several times a day' is not translated and it is clear that the idea of ' shopping is not translated too as it is a part of the phrase that contains the description of Muslim Prayers that they offer five times a day. This may be kept without translation, as for Muslims it is extremely inappropriate to mock their religion or religious rituals, and their culture does not allow that either. As the translator is the 'insider' of this culture and is also aware of the impact of religion on it, he has most probably avoided translating this entire phrase. In example 9, 'The gods' is not translated as the TT culture is mainly influenced by Islam, and to talk about more than one god would be completely unacceptable for the followers of this monotheistic religion. Hence the entire sentence is not translated into the TT. As for example 10 in the ST, interestingly, the translator has not considered translating an entire paragraph apparently because it mentioned a couple kissing in public. This paragraph was completely omitted in the TT. Public display of affection, even for those who are married, is considered extremely inappropriate in the target text culture so the translator has not translated the entire paragraph.

Table 3

Concepts Based on Cultural/Social Norms (iii)

Source Text (English)	Target Text (Urdu)	Back Translation
6. "…you'll learn that our countryside is the best, and **our women the most beautiful."** (Clarke: 10)	ایک دن تمھیں احساس ہوگا کہ تم جس علاقِ کو چھوڑکر جا رہے ہو وہ دنیا کا سب سے خوبصورت علاقہ ہے ۔۔۔ (AlGhazali: 29)	One day you will realize that the region that you are leaving is the most beautiful region on earth. (**The phrase in bold in the source text is not translated in Urdu.**)
7. and he had thought how he would become rich, and **have beautiful women at his side as he grew older.** (Clarke: 47)	اور وہ بہت جلد امیر ہونے کا خواب دیکھتا تھا۔ (AlGhazali: 53)	And used to dream of being rich really fast. (**The phrase in bold in the source text is not translated in Urdu.**)

| 8. | That wind had brought the Moors, yes, but it had also brought the **smell of the desert and of veiled women** (Clarke: 29) | اسی لیونترا کے ساتھ کبھی عرب فاتح آ ئے تھے۔اور اس کے ہی دوش پر **ان لوگوں** کے پسینے او خوابوں کی خوشبو بھی آتی تھی ۔ (AlGhazali: 42) | With this levanter (wind) once came the Arabs. And through it also came **the fragrance of these people's sweat and dreams. (The phrase in bold in the source text is not translated in Urdu.)** |

Example 11 shown in Table 3 represents an instance of deletion where the translator has chosen to not translate an entire phrase of the ST into the TT. It seems he did not translate 'our women the most beautiful' in Urdu because people in his culture (which he shares with his intended reader) do not like to talk about women and their physical beauty as openly as they do in the ST culture. The textual context of this example is that in this part of the novel, the father of our protagonist is talking to him and trying to tell him how beautiful his own village and their own women are compared to those in any other part of the world. Considering the TT culture, it seems absurd, especially in culturally conservative families that a father and son could be engaged in a conversation about the beauty of women as freely as they have engaged in the ST. Example 12 illustrates a similar cultural issue arising from the translator's 'emic' knowledge of his culture which he shares with the target readers of his translated text. The phrase, 'have beautiful women at his side as he grew older' is not translated into the TT as the idea of being in a relationship with multiple women is considered extremely inappropriate. As for Example 13, 'smell of the desert and of veiled women' is not translated as it should have been. The reason seems to be that 'veiled women' are considered to be more religious, and, generally, it is not appropriate to describe their beauty or in this case 'their smell'. Hence the entire phrase was altered this time instead of completely avoiding the translation at all, 'the fragrance of these people's sweat and dreams' as shown in the back translation of his TT.

These ideas about not discussing women's beauty or not engaging in illicit relationships with women have also evolved from the religion of the majority of the people in Pakistan who are the followers of Islam. Hence the translator has completely removed these concepts from his TT and does not translate them at all.

Table 4

Concepts Based on Social Norms

Source Text (English)	Target Text (Urdu)	Back Translation
9. And I will tell you how to find the hidden treasure. **Good afternoon.** (Clarke: 26)	اور میں تمہیں خفیہ خزانے کا پتہ بتاؤں گا۔ (AlGhazali: 40)	And I will tell you the way to the hidden treasure. (**The phrase in bold in the source text is not translated in Urdu.**)

| 10. He went over to the bakery **and bought a loaf of bread**, (Clarke: 26) | وہ اٹھا اور بیکری کی طرف چلنے لگا تا کہ کھانے کے لیے کچھ خرید سکے۔ (AlGhazali: 41) | He stood up and started walking towards the bakery **so he could buy something to eat**. |
| 11. He knew how to shear sheep, **how to care for pregnant ewes,** (Clarke: 27) | اس نے یہ بھی جان لیا تھا کہ بھیڑ کی اون کیسے اتارتے ہیں۔ **وہ بھیڑوں کی معمولی بیماریوں کا علاج بھی جانتا تھا۔** (AlGhazali: 41) | He had learned how to shear a sheep. **He also knew how to treat some minor ailments for sheep.** |

Examples 14, 15, and 16, as shown in Table 4 seem to be purely based on the social norms of the TT culture. In Example 14, the greeting 'Good afternoon.' is not translated most probably because there is no cultural equivalence available in the TT. People do not greet by saying 'Good afternoon' in Urdu. There are equivalents for 'Good morning' صبح بخیر and 'Good night' شب بخیر but not for 'Good afternoon'. As for example 15, people in the TT culture mainly eat a special type of bread called 'roti' or 'chapati', which has no loaf. Hence most probably the translator has not even considered translating it and has substituted more generic phrase 'so he could buy something to eat' instead. Moreover, Example 16 is an example that illustrates a kind of a taboo idea which people normally will not discuss openly with each other or in public, i.e., pregnancy. Instead of translating 'how to care for pregnant ewes' the translator changed it to 'He also knew how to treat some minor ailments for sheep.' So it is interesting how the translator has chosen to translate 'pregnancy' into an 'ailment'.

5. Conclusion

Data analysis has proved that the translator has avoided translating the culture of the ST as much as possible, even at the cost of the sense of the actual meaning. It is also concluded that in the majority of instances, whenever a term was used in the ST that was religiously inappropriate, the translator tended to delete it from his TT. Sometimes, he substituted a religiously unacceptable word with a completely different word from the target language, even if it did not convey the sense at all. To summarize, it is clear from the results of the data analysis that the translator has shown cultural bias in his TT based on (a) his religious beliefs, or (b) his social norms. He has used two strategies to showcase that bias:

1. Deletion of ST items (word, phrase or sentence), or
2. Substituting the items with completely different items from the target text language.

There seemed to be no consistency or pattern in the way he utilized these two strategies. In other words, there appeared to be no relationship between his choice of one strategy over the other based on his either purely religious beliefs or social norms. Sometimes, he chose to delete an entire paragraph (see example 10) whereas on other occasions he substituted a word from the target text language that did not mean the same (inappropriate according to the translator's culture) in the ST (see examples 1-5). Hence

it may be concluded that as an 'insider' of the target text culture, the translator takes the liberty of altering the source text, of which he is an 'outsider'. By doing this he avoids translating the cultural aspects of the language he is translating.

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